

# Pledge of Allegiance

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The **Pledge of Allegiance** to the United States flag is an oath of loyalty to the country. It is recited at many public events. US Congressional sessions open with the recitation of the Pledge.

The current Pledge of Allegiance reads as follows:

*"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands: one Nation under God, indivisible, with Liberty and Justice for all."*

It should be recited by standing at attention facing the flag with the right hand over the heart. When not in uniform, men should remove any non-religious headdress with their right hand and hold it at the left shoulder, the hand being over the heart. People in uniform should remain silent, face the flag, and render the military salute.<sup>[1]</sup>

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## History



Students reciting the pledge on Flag Day in 1899

The Pledge of Allegiance was written in 1892 by Francis Bellamy (1855-1931), a Baptist minister, a Christian Socialist, and the cousin of Socialist Utopian novelist Edward Bellamy (1850-1898). Bellamy's original "Pledge of Allegiance" was published in the September 8th issue of the popular children's magazine *The Youth's Companion* as part of the National Public-School Celebration of Columbus Day, a celebration of the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's discovery of America, conceived by James B. Upham.

Bellamy's original Pledge read, "I Pledge Allegiance to my Flag and the Republic for which it stands, one nation indivisible with liberty and justice for all."

The pledge was supposed to be quick and to the point. Bellamy designed it to be stated in 15 seconds. He had initially also considered using the words *equality* and *fraternity* but decided they were too controversial since many people opposed equal rights for women and blacks.

After a proclamation by President Benjamin Harrison, the Pledge was first used in public schools on October 12, 1892 during Columbus Day observances. This date was also significant as it was the dedication day of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Illinois. Bellamy thought that the pledge itself and the involvement of children across the country would be a fine show of national solidarity.

In 1923 the National Flag Conference called for the words *my Flag* to be changed to *the Flag of the United States*. The reason given was to ensure that immigrants knew to which flag reference was being made. The words "of America" were added a year later. The U.S. Congress officially recognized the Pledge as the official national pledge on June 22, 1942.

### Official versions (changes in *bold italics*)

#### 1892

"I pledge allegiance to my flag and the republic for which it stands: one nation indivisible with liberty and justice for all."

#### 1892 to 1923

"I pledge allegiance to my flag and *to* the republic for which it stands: one nation indivisible with liberty and justice for all."

#### 1923 to 1924

"I pledge allegiance to *the* flag *of the United States* and to the republic for which it stands: one nation indivisible with liberty and justice for all."

#### 1924 to 1954

"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States *of America*, and to the republic for which it stands: one nation indivisible with liberty and justice for all."

#### 1954 to Present

"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands: one nation *under God*, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

In 1940 the Supreme Court, in deciding the case of *Minersville School District v. Gobitis*, ruled that students in public schools could be compelled to recite the Pledge, even Jehovah's Witnesses like the Gobitases, who considered the flag salute to be idolatry. In the wake of this ruling, there was a rash of mob violence and intimidation against Jehovah's Witnesses. In 1943 the Supreme Court reversed its decision, ruling in *West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette* that "compulsory unification of opinion" violated the First Amendment.<sup>[2]</sup>

Reciting of the pledge is accompanied by a salute. An early version of the salute, adopted in 1892, was known as the Bellamy salute. It ended with the arm outstretched and the palm upwards. Because of the similarity between the Bellamy salute and the Nazi salute, President Franklin D. Roosevelt instituted the hand-over-the-heart gesture as the salute to be rendered by civilians during the **Pledge of Allegiance** and the national anthem in the United States, instead of the Bellamy salute. This was done when Congress officially adopted the *Flag Code* on 22 June 1942.<sup>[3]</sup>

## Addition of the words "under God"

The Knights of Columbus in New York City felt that the pledge was incomplete without any reference to a deity.<sup>[4]</sup> Appealing to the authority of Abraham Lincoln, the Knights felt that the words "under God" which were from Lincoln's Gettysburg Address were most appropriate to add to the Pledge. In New York City on April 30, 1951, the Board of Directors of the Knights of Columbus adopted a resolution to amend their recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance at the opening of each of the meetings of the 800 Fourth Degree Assemblies of the Knights of Columbus by addition of the words "under God" after the words "one nation." In the following two years, the idea spread throughout Knights of Columbus organizations nationwide. On August 21, 1952, the Supreme Council of the Knights of Columbus at its annual meeting adopted a resolution urging that the change be made universal and copies of this resolution were sent to the President, the Vice President (as Presiding Officer of the Senate) and the Speaker of the House of Representatives. The National Fraternal Congress meeting in Boston on September 24, 1952, adopted a similar resolution upon the recommendation of its President, Supreme Knight Luke E. Hart. Several State Fraternal Congresses acted likewise almost immediately thereafter. This campaign led to several official attempts to prompt Congress to adopt the Knights of Columbus' policy for the entire nation. These attempts failed.

In 1952, Holger Christian Langmack wrote a letter to President Truman suggesting the inclusion of "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance. Mr. Langmack was a Danish Philosopher and Educator who came to America in 1911. He was one of the originators of the Prayer Breakfast, and a religious leader in Washington DC. President Truman responded to Mr. Langmack, and agreed to meet him along with several others to discuss the inclusion of "under God" and also "love" just before "Liberty and Justice". This meeting took place in 1952, and the seed was planted for the inclusion of "under God".

The Knights of Columbus tried repeatedly, but they were unsuccessful in their attempts to persuade the United States government to amend the pledge. Bills were introduced as early as 1953, when Representative Louis C. Rabaut of Michigan sponsored a resolution at the suggestion of a correspondent. It was a Presbyterian minister who made the difference in 1954 by preaching a sermon about Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. The minister was George MacPherson Docherty, a native of Scotland who was called to succeed Peter Marshall as pastor of the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church near the White House, where, in 1863, the same year as the address, Lincoln attended and even rented a pew. After Lincoln's death, the pew that he rented became something of a national monument. It became customary for later United States presidents to attend services at the church and sit in the Lincoln pew on the Sunday closest to Lincoln's birthday (February 12) each year.

As Lincoln Sunday (February 7, 1954) approached, Rev. Docherty knew not only that President Dwight Eisenhower was to be in attendance, but that it was more than just an annual ritual for him. While raised a Jehovah's Witness, Eisenhower had been baptized a Presbyterian just a year earlier. Docherty's sermon focused on the Gettysburg Address, drawing its title from the address, "A New Birth of Freedom."

Docherty's message began with a comparison of the United States to ancient Sparta. Docherty noted that a traveler to ancient Sparta was amazed by the fact that the Spartans' national might was not to be found in their walls, their shields,

or their weapons, but in their spirit. Likewise, said Docherty, the might of the United States should not be thought of as emanating from their newly developed atomic weapons, but in their spirit, the "American way of life". In the remainder of the sermon Docherty sought to define as succinctly as possible the essence of the American spirit and way of life. To do so, Docherty appealed to those two words in Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. According to Docherty, what has made the United States both unique and strong was her sense of being the nation that Lincoln described: a nation "under God." Docherty took the opportunity to tell a story of a conversation with his children about the Pledge of Allegiance. Docherty was troubled by the fact that it did not include any reference to the deity. Without such reference, Docherty insisted that the Pledge could apply to just about any nation. He felt that the pledge should reflect the American spirit and way of life as defined by Lincoln.

After the service concluded, Docherty had opportunity to converse with Eisenhower about the substance of the sermon. The President expressed his enthusiastic concurrence with Docherty's view, and the very next day, Eisenhower had the wheels turning in Congress to incorporate Docherty's suggestion into law. On February 8, 1954, Rep. Charles Oakman (R-Mich.), introduced a bill to that effect. On Lincoln's birthday, four days later, Oakman made the following speech on the floor of the House:



*Last Sunday, the President of the United States and his family occupied the pew where Abraham Lincoln worshipped. The pastor, the Reverend George M. Docherty, suggested the change in our Pledge of Allegiance that I have offered [as a bill]. Dr. Docherty delivered a wise sermon. He said that as a native of Scotland come to these shores he could appreciate the pledge as something more than a hollow verse taught to children for memory. I would like to quote from his words. He said, 'there was something missing in the pledge, and that which was missing was the characteristic and definitive factor in the American way of life.' Mr. Speaker, I think Mr. Docherty hit the nail square on the head.*

Senator Homer Ferguson, in his report to the Congress on March 10, 1954, said, "The introduction of this joint resolution was suggested to me by a sermon given recently by the Rev. George M. Docherty, of Washington, D.C., who is pastor of the church at which Lincoln worshipped." This time Congress concurred with the Oakman-Ferguson resolution, and Eisenhower opted to sign the bill into law on Flag Day (June 14, 1954). The fact that Eisenhower clearly had Docherty's rationale in mind as he initiated and consummated this measure is apparent in a letter he wrote in August, 1954.

Paraphrasing Docherty's sermon, Eisenhower said

*These words ["under God"] will remind Americans that despite our great physical strength we must remain humble. They will help us to keep constantly in our minds and hearts the spiritual and moral principles which alone give dignity to man, and upon which our way of life is founded.*

Docherty's sermon was published by Harper & Bros. in New York in 1958 and President Eisenhower took the opportunity to write to Dr. Docherty with gratitude for the opportunity to once again read the sermon.

## Criticism of requiring or promoting the Pledge

Government requiring or promoting of the Pledge has drawn criticism and legal challenges on several grounds. Prominent legal challenges have been based on the contention that state-sponsored requiring or promoting of the Pledge is unconstitutional because it violates one or both of the religion clauses in the First Amendment.

Central to challenges in the 1940s were Jehovah's Witnesses, a group whose beliefs preclude swearing loyalty to any power lesser than God, and who objected to policies in public schools requiring students to recite the Pledge. They objected on the grounds that their rights to freedom of religion as guaranteed by the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment were being violated by such requirements.

Other objections have been raised since the addition of the phrase "under God" to the Pledge in 1954. Many critics contend that a government requiring or promoting this phrase violates protections against establishment of religion guaranteed in the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

In a 2002 case brought by atheist Michael Newdow, whose daughter was being taught the Pledge in school, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled the phrase "under God" an unconstitutional endorsement of monotheism when the Pledge was promoted in public school. In 2004, the Supreme Court heard *Elk Grove Unified School District v. Newdow*, an appeal of the ruling, and rejected Newdow's claim on the grounds that he was not the custodial parent, and therefore lacked standing, thus avoiding ruling on the merits of whether the phrase was constitutional in a school-sponsored recitation. On January 3, 2005, a new suit was filed in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of California on behalf of three unnamed families. On September 14, 2005, District Court Judge Lawrence Karlton ruled in their favor. Citing the precedent of the 2002 ruling by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, Judge Karlton issued an Order stating that, upon proper motion, he will enjoin the school district defendants from continuing their practices of leading children in pledging allegiance to "one Nation under God".<sup>[5]</sup>

In 2004, linguist Geoffrey Nunberg criticized the addition of "under God" for a different reason. The original supporters of the addition thought that they were simply quoting Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. However, Nunberg said that to Lincoln and his contemporaries, "under God" meant "God willing" and they would have found its use in the Pledge of Allegiance grammatically incorrect.<sup>[6][7]</sup>

A bill — H.R. 2389 — was introduced in Congress in 2005 which, if enacted into law, would have stripped the Supreme Court and most federal courts of the power to consider any legal challenges to government requiring or promoting of the Pledge of Allegiance. H.R. 2389 was passed by the House of Representatives in July 2006, but failed due to the Senate's not taking it up. Even if a similar bill is enacted, its practical effect may not be clear: proponents of the bill have argued that it is a valid exercise of Congress's power to regulate the jurisdiction of the federal courts under Article III, Section 2 of the Constitution, but opponents question whether Congress has the authority to prevent the Supreme Court from hearing claims based on the Bill of Rights (since amendments postdate the original text of the Constitution and may thus implicitly limit the scope of Article III, Section 2).

In 2006, in the Florida case *Frazier v. Alexandre*, No. 05-81142 (S.D. Fla. May 31, 2006) "A federal district court in Florida has ruled that a 1942 state law requiring students to stand and recite the Pledge of Allegiance violates the First and Fourteenth Amendments of the U.S. Constitution."<sup>[8][9]</sup>

## See also

- American's Creed
- Bellamy salute
- Eight Honors and Eight Disgraces
- Oath of allegiance
- Oath of Allegiance (Canada)
- Oath of Allegiance (Ireland)
- Panunumpa ng Katapatan sa Watawat (Philippines)
- Pledge Across America
- Pledge of Allegiance criticism
- Religious Heritage of America

## Notes

- ↑ Title 4, Chapter 1, Section 4, US Code, http://uscode.house.gov/download/pls/04C1.txt [1]
- ↑ Hodak, George (June 2008), "Flag Day Reversal". *ABA Journal*. **94** (6):72
- ↑ Leepson, Marc (2006). *Flag: An American Biography*. Macmillan. pp. 171. ISBN 0312323093.
- ↑ "Knights of Columbus Fact Sheet". *Knights of Columbus Fact Sheet*. Knights of Columbus. 2007-11-15.

<http://www.kofc.org/un/cmf/resources/communications/documents/pledgesheet.pdf/>. Retrieved on 2008-10-15.

5. <sup>^</sup> [2]
6. <sup>^</sup> Geoffrey Nunberg (2004-06-20). "I Might Have Guessed Parson Weems Would Figure In There Somewhere". *Language Log*. <http://itre.cis.upenn.edu/~myl/languagelog/archives/001089.html>. Retrieved on 2007-05-03.
7. <sup>^</sup> Geoffrey Nunberg (2004-06-20). ""(Next) Under God," Phrasal Idiom". *Language Log*. <http://itre.cis.upenn.edu/~myl/languagelog/archives/001090.html>. Retrieved on 2007-05-03.
8. <sup>^</sup> [3]
9. <sup>^</sup> [4]

## References

- Richard J. Ellis (2005). *To the Flag: The Unlikely History of the Pledge of Allegiance* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press) ISBN 0700613722
- Marc Leepson (2005). *Flag: An American Biography*[5] (Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martin's Press) ISBN 0-312-32308-5
- Title 4, Chapter 1 of United States Code
- "How 'Under God' Got in There," Washington Post
- Associated Press: "50 Years Ago, Sermon Spurred Putting 'Under God' in Pledge"
- "How the Pledge Got God," Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
- "A New Birth of Freedom," Docherty's sermon, heard by Eisenhower, which led to the amendment of the Pledge
- Docherty's Sermon Manuscript, Feb. 7, 1954
- Minister Reprises "Under God" Sermon

## External links

- Annual Pledge Across America - held on Constitution Day, September 17
- Nonpartisan Overview of Under God debate
- The Pledge of Allegiance: A Brief Commentary
- The Pledge of Allegiance - A Centennial History, 1892 - 1992

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